

Response to Back to Basics

by Doug Jacques

My initial response to Andrew McMartin's article (see page 7 of this issue) was recollecting a period in my life more than 30 years ago when I ventured into the woods with little to survive. During one venture by myself, I had a short period of time where I felt perfectly at home in the wilderness. Although years of immersion and wise leadership at a summer camp led up this moment, it was the time to just be in nature that evoked the connection. As I was well nourished by a life working outdoors, this sense of place is permanent. During the past 17 years of teaching an integrated course (The Bronte Creek Project), it has also been my experience that such a relationship with wilderness can be facilitated. McMartin makes an important point in suggesting spending quality time doing a few things, and thus knowing them well.

Taking the time to encourage being childlike is one of the benefits of slowing down that resonated with me. Emmerson (1954) pointed out that "the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other, who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" (p. 4). Although some might not find the topics connected, I found myself wanting to add perspectives of self growth and belonging to a community as integral components of discovering one's place in the natural world. Long captivated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's exploration of humans as noble in their natural state, it seems that in a vastly complex society removed almost entirely from nature, education in the outdoors offers an opportunity for participants to be introspective and rediscover what is noble and inspiring about themselves.

In considering quality vs. quantity in outdoor education it is still important from my perspective to be conscious of one's viewpoint. I have taught and run trips from a survival perspective, an Earth Education Perspective,

and a Native Rediscovery perspective. Although being passionate and walking the walk inspires involvement, it is also critical thinking skills, reflection, and involvement in the design and leadership of the experiences that ensure participants develop their own connections, relationships and learnings. Quality experiences well taught should reflect the complexity and diversity of the human experience.

In expressing the thought that few people can say that they have experienced a day where they did more good for the Earth than bad, McMartin highlights what has become the primary focus of environmental and outdoor education. From my perspective of encouraging students to develop a relationship with themselves, other people and the planet, doing more good for the Earth is a way of deepening those relationships. Developing a personal environmental ethic is perhaps the modern day basic for all outdoor educators.

As a practitioner I found McMartin's article on quality vs. quantity in outdoor education both reaffirming and thought provoking. Although at first the complexity of what we might, can and should do as outdoor educators can be daunting, my experience and intuition is that it is not. If we can encourage happy and unexpected discovery (i.e., serendipity) by being prepared, knowledgeable, and applying our best judgement and wisdom, students will continue their learning on their own.

References

- Emmerson, R. W. (1954). *Five essays on man and nature*. New York, NY: Appleton Century Crofts.

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